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Iraq: The Progress Made, The Road Ahead, and the Consequences of Quitting

“We fight today because Iraq now carries the hope of freedom in a vital region of the world, and the rise of democracy will be the ultimate triumph over radicalism and terror. And we fight today because terrorists want to attack our country and kill our citizens, and Iraq is where they are making their stand. So we’ll fight them there, we’ll fight them across the world, and we will stay in the fight until the fight is won.”

— President Bush, speaking to the Nation, June 28, 2005

Introduction

Does the ongoing struggle for democracy in Iraq mark a success or a quagmire? Critics — particularly those who long have opposed this Administration’s policies — argue the latter. On June 28, 2005, in an effort to reengage the American people in this debate, President Bush made clear that significant progress was being made in Iraq, and that the road ahead, while challenging, will reap great rewards for America and Iraq in terms of promoting freedom and security. The President also reminded Americans that the consequences of quitting our mission before the objective has been achieved would be disastrous.

One year ago, on June 28, 2004, control over Iraq’s future transferred from the Coalition forces to the Iraqi people. Only 15 months before that date, Iraq’s destiny was firmly held by Saddam Hussein, a ruthless dictator who: was responsible for the torture and murder of tens of thousands of Iraqi citizens; denied personal freedoms and the rule of law; openly supported Palestinian terrorists; and waged war against many of his neighbors — even using chemical weapons in an eight-year war with Iran. Already it is clear that the transfer of sovereignty was a watershed event in Iraq’s history. During the past year, and under the direction of a free Iraqi government (in cooperation with the U.S., Coalition forces from more than 30 countries, and the international community, including NATO and the United Nations), the country has made sweeping progress in rebuilding critical infrastructure and the economy, providing basic services, and democratizing the country following more than three decades of the Hussein dictatorship.

However, in the prelude to last year’s historic event, naysayers and critics — some of whom were adamantly opposed to the Coalition’s liberation of Iraq — argued that sovereignty should not be transferred so soon to the Iraqis because the Iraqis, themselves, were not ready to govern their own country. Interestingly, other critics argued just the opposite: that sovereignty

should be transferred immediately to the Iraqis because they know what is best for their own country. And, others argued that the United States should withdraw its forces following the sovereignty transfer.

Now, one year later, critics again are on the attack making false arguments that little progress has been made in Iraq and that the liberation has cost too much in terms of dollars and lives, thus attempting to put a cost ceiling on what it takes to keep America safe. Moreover, some critics, while professing that Iraq is in turmoil, have boldly called for a timetable for when U.S. forces will withdraw from Iraq. Not only does such thinking demoralize the Iraqi government and people, but it also emboldens the insurgents into thinking that it will be their actions — and not the completion of the mission — that caused the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq.

In his recent address to the nation, President Bush confronted the critics' claims, citing the role that America's armed forces have played in destroying insurgent and terrorist forces in Iraq and in training Iraqi security forces to take on these tasks. The President also highlighted the democratic achievements already made, i.e., national elections and the drafting of a permanent constitution, which is one of the two main elements necessary for a stable and functioning Iraq — and also is part of the President's "exit strategy" for determining when U.S. forces will leave Iraq.

This paper will highlight and build upon the President's remarks on why America is in Iraq, and the progress Coalition forces and the Iraqi people have made in rebuilding Iraq. This paper also will provide additional support for why America must continue the fight in Iraq as part of the War on Terrorism. Finally, this paper will examine some of the probable consequences that would befall the United States, Iraq, and the Middle East if American forces were pressured to come home before their mission was accomplished.

Democracy and Security Gains Since the Liberation

During the past two years since American and Coalition forces liberated 25 million Iraqi people from the clutches of Saddam Hussein's regime, dramatic progress has been achieved by the Iraqi people with regard to establishing a democratic government and functioning security services. Most of this success has only been reported minimally by the media.

Democracy Gains

The country's interim constitution, or Transitional Administrative Law (TAL), was signed on March 8, 2004 after receiving a unanimous vote of support by the 25-Member Iraqi Governing Council. The TAL, a landmark document for Iraq and the Arab world, states that Iraq's system of government will be republican, federal, democratic, and pluralistic, and that federalism will be based on geography, history, and the separation of powers — not on ethnicity or sect (Article 4). The TAL serves as the foundation for Iraq's government and legal structure until the permanent constitution is drafted — a process that must be completed by August 15, 2005. This drafting process is inclusive of all major political and ethnic parties given that the Sunnis, who boycotted the January elections, have determined that they want to have a stake in

determining the course of Iraq's future. A national referendum on the constitution is scheduled to be held on October 15.

On January 30, 2005, Iraqis held a landmark election in which more than 8.5 million Iraqis voted in defiance of the threats issued by the terrorists. The Iraqi people directly elected provincial councils (for Iraq's 18 provinces), a Kurdish regional assembly, and a 275-seat Transitional National Assembly (TNA), which, in turn, elected a President and Prime Minister. The TNA serves as Iraq's national legislature until national elections are held for a permanent government, currently scheduled to occur on December 15, 2005.

Lost among many is the fact that power twice has been transferred peacefully from three different Iraqi governments during the past 18 months. The first peaceful transfer occurred on June 28, 2004, when the Iraqi Governing Council was dissolved and the Interim Iraqi Government became the country's governing body. The second transfer occurred in February 2005, when the National Assembly was installed and then, in April 2005, when the Assembly approved the presidency council, prime minister, and executive cabinet. The final transfer of power from one Iraqi government to the next will occur following the approval of the country's new constitution and the people vote for their permanent government.

Security Gains

More than 168,000 Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have been trained and equipped and are actively engaged in providing security throughout their country.¹ As the President noted in his recent remarks, not all of the Iraqi forces are graded at top proficiency right now; but some are, and all are working toward that goal. He elaborated in saying, "Some are capable of taking on the terrorists and insurgents by themselves. A large number can plan and execute anti-terrorist operations with coalition support. The rest are forming and not yet ready to participate fully in security operations. Our task is to make the Iraqi units fully capable and independent. We're building up Iraqi security forces as quickly as possible, so they can assume the lead in defeating the terrorists and insurgents."² In fact, a company of newly trained Iraqi troops assisted U.S. Forces during Operation Spear in western Iraq.³

In testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on June 23, U.S. Army Lieutenant General John Vines, Commander of Multinational Corps Iraq, noted that, at this time last year, there was one battalion trained and equipped.⁴ Now more than 100 battalions of the Iraqi army are fielded, and over 80,000 other forces — border police, Ministry of Interior forces, and Facilities Protection Services — have been fielded. "Their performance on the whole has been very good,"⁵ Gen. Vines said. "They're well fed, they've proven that they are patriotic, they're willing to fight, and they do extraordinarily well."⁶ Gen. Vines added that recruitment of new Iraqi security forces remains strong.

¹ U.S. Department of State, "Iraq Weekly Status Report," June 22, 2005.

² Remarks by President George W. Bush at Ft. Bragg, North Carolina, on June 28, 2005.

³ U.S. Department of State, June 22, 2005.

⁴ U.S. Army Lt. Gen. John Vines, Commander of Multinational Corps Iraq on Iraq's Security Forces, in testimony before the House Armed Services Committee on June 23, 2005.

⁵ Vines, June 23, 2005.

⁶ Vines, June 23, 2005.

Another often overlooked fact is that the majority of the violence occurring in Iraq today is taking place in only 4 of the country's 18 provinces. These four provinces represent the Sunni Triangle. It was noted recently that there are less than three violent attacks per day in all of Iraq's other 14 provinces.⁷

The Road Ahead

The President has clearly outlined the goals that need to be achieved in order for U.S. forces to leave Iraq. Those goals have been and remain that Iraq become a functioning democracy and that it be able to provide for its own security.⁸ And, as the President said on the day sovereignty was transferred to the Iraqi people, "Our military will stay as long as the stability of Iraq requires, and only as long as their presence is needed and requested by the Iraqi government."⁹

On June 22, the United States and the European Union co-hosted an international conference on Iraq that allowed the Iraqi government to outline its priorities and reform agenda, and also allowed the representatives from more than 80 countries to offer their proposals for how to engage with the newly democratic Iraq. As Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice remarked, "Iraqis themselves will set the course of Iraq's future. But they will not bear the weight of their responsibilities alone. Iraq has many allies in the international community, as we are demonstrating with this remarkable gathering here today."¹⁰

With regard to training Iraqi security forces, the Coalition is continuing to transition responsibilities to Iraqi Security Forces and is working to develop the leadership and loyalty of the ISF to ensure that it can ultimately defeat the insurgency on its own.

On June 28, the President outlined three new steps to further prepare Iraqi forces to fight on their own. These steps include: creating Coalition and Iraqi unit partnerships; embedding Coalition "Transition Teams" to teach Iraqis to be self-sufficient; and strengthening the Iraqi ministries of defense and interior so that they can develop modern command-and-control structures to coordinate anti-terrorist operations, thus allowing Iraqis to more effectively manage their forces in the fight against terror.

The Consequences of Quitting

As opposed to the numerous benefits of the success to be had in Iraq by seeing the job through, the consequences of failure are cataclysmic. A U.S. withdrawal from Iraq, at some time table other than our own, would negatively impact our security interests domestically, regionally, and globally.

⁷ General George W. Casey, Jr. (USA) speaking on ABC's "Good Morning America," June 27, 2005.

⁸ Remarks by President Bush in a meeting with Australian Prime Minister John Howard, May 3, 2003.

⁹ Remarks by President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair on transfer of Iraqi sovereignty, June 28, 2004.

¹⁰ Remarks by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice at the Opening Session of the International Conference on Iraq in Brussels, June 22, 2005.

Leaving before Iraq can provide for its own security directly harms the national security of the United States.

Currently, coalition troops, in concert with Iraqi security forces, are providing the security environment required for democracy to flourish. We provide that environment because it is the national security strategy of the United States to promote democracy,¹¹ and rightfully so. Democracies generally do not go to war with each other,¹² are quite less likely to slaughter their own citizens,¹³ and are responsible for the vast majority of economic development and production in the world today.¹⁴ A democratic Iraq makes the world and the United States safer.

A premature departure from Iraq would damage democratic advances, which directly harms the United States.

Since a democratic Iraq make us more secure, spreading democracy to the remainder of the region would increase security even more. As the President has noted, we are safer when democracies thrive. A U.S. departure from Iraq at the schedule of the terrorists would set back democratic advances in the region, and hence make us less safe. Iraq is a beacon of democracy in a region sorely needing one. In the last few months, there have also been elections in the Palestinian territories and in Lebanon, elections that “are inspiring democratic reformers in places like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.”¹⁵ If democracy fails in Iraq, it will extinguish hopes throughout the region and set back the progress made elsewhere.

A terrorist victory in Iraq would also embolden political violence everywhere. President Bush noted how a “critical element of our strategy is to help ensure that the hopes Iraqis expressed at the polls in January are translated into a secure democracy.”¹⁶ Democracies are defined by their peaceful transition of government, and when a democratically elected government is overthrown by force somewhere, it may embolden anti-democratic groups everywhere. In fact, the example would be particularly acute in the Middle East among the moderate regimes that are concerned with extremists in their own country, such as Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Egypt. The extremists would be highly motivated by an overthrow of a moderate regime by an insurgent force. Not only would insurgent groups be emboldened, but states that sponsor such groups, such as Iran and Syria, could take an insurgent success in Iraq as an event legitimating their strategies and policies.

A terrorist victory in Iraq directly threatens regional allies.

If terrorists are able to gain a foothold in Iraq, the nation would be returned to a Saddam Hussein-style Iraq that supports terror and threatens its neighbors. This, in turn, threatens U.S. allies in the region, namely Israel and other pro-U.S. governments. In the days of Saddam Hussein, Iraq actively supported Palestinian terrorist groups that openly advocated the

¹¹ National Security Strategy of the United States, p. ii (Sept. 2002) (“We will actively work to bring the hope of democracy . . . to every corner of the world.”).

¹² John Norton Moore, “Beyond the Democratic Peace: Solving the War Puzzle,” 44 Va. J. Int’l L. 341, 343 (2004).

¹³ John Norton Moore.

¹⁴ John Norton Moore.

¹⁵ President Bush, June 28, 2005.

¹⁶ President Bush, June 28, 2005.

destruction of Israel.¹⁷ It is very likely that, were the terrorists to drive U.S. forces from Iraq, the terrorists of Iraq would renew ties with Palestinian terrorists and reestablish Iraq as a place of refuge for Palestinian terrorists, thereby directly threatening the security of Israel.

Allowing terrorists to defeat us in Iraq would directly contradict our policy to eliminate safe havens for terrorists.

An integral element of the United States national security strategy to defeat terrorism is to deny terrorists safe haven and sanctuary.¹⁸ In the days after the attacks of September 11th, the President made clear that “any nation that continues to harbor or support terrorism will be regarded by the United States as a hostile regime.”¹⁹ Since a democratic Iraq would make the world and the United States safer, it is conversely true that an Iraq governed by a terrorist regime would directly threaten the national security of the United States.

For some reason, critics continue to raise the chimera that Iraq was not a haven for terrorism prior to this war, and only became so after the removal of Saddam Hussein. This is demonstrably false. Iraq had been designated as a state sponsor of terror since 1993,²⁰ and the State Department continually outlined Iraq’s support for international terrorism prior to both the attacks of September 11th and the current war in Iraq. For example, in 1999, the State Department specifically stated that “Iraq continued to plan and sponsor international terrorism in 1999.”²¹ If the United States were to depart from Iraq prematurely, Iraq may again become a safe haven for terrorists.

Departing Iraq without securing democracy hurts America’s credibility throughout the world in the pursuit of its national security interests.

In Iraq, the United States has staked its credibility on both fighting terrorism and promoting democracy, as it is fighting against terrorist insurgents in an effort to secure a democracy in the Middle East. Failure is simply not an option, as it would call into question every other anti-terror or pro-democracy initiative underway, which is a message the United States does not want to send to our international partners.

Departing Iraq in response to critics who label the situation a “quagmire” due to combat deaths would only validate the terrorists’ view that the United States is casualty-averse. This not only is a bad signal to send to our enemies but also is a demoralizing message to the American public. It would illustrate that we could be defeated by a counterforce. These are assuredly signals we do not want to send either to our enemies or our allies.

¹⁷ State Department, Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1997, p. 32 (Apr. 1998) (“Iraq continue[d] to provide safehaven to a variety of Palestinian terrorist groups.”).

¹⁸ National Security Strategy of the United States, pp. 5-7 (Sept. 2002).

¹⁹ George W. Bush, President’s Address to a Joint Session of Congress, Sept. 20, 2001, 37 Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents 1347 (Sept. 24, 2001).

²⁰ State Department, Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1999, p. iv (Apr. 2000).

²¹ State Department, Patterns of Global Terrorism: 1999, p. 34 (Apr. 2000).

Conclusion

It would be devastating if our soldiers and policymakers lose the political support necessary to conduct the War on Terrorism along with all of the elements needed for success. Critics and naysayers need to recall that the liberation of Iraq has not been in vain. On June 28, 2004, the United States and its Coalition partners handed over sovereignty to the Iraqi people. The overwhelming majority of Iraqis have embraced democracy, established a civil society founded on the principles of the rule of law and respect for individual rights, and support the destruction of the insurgents and terrorists forces.

America rightly must remain engaged in Iraq's stabilization efforts to ensure that democracy is not defeated by those who seek to return to the tyrannical rule of Saddam Hussein. A premature, politically motivated withdrawal of U.S. forces from Iraq would have dire security consequences for the United States, Iraq, and the Middle East.